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ABSTRACT

A significant theme in the literature on rural education is the extreme interdependence between rural schools and rural communities. Belief in this interdependence has led to a number of initiatives focused on strengthening both student learning and the local community's economic and social resources. Most of these initiatives involve some degree of formal or informal collaboration between schools and community residents. The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) has developed a process for supporting collaborative work between schools and communities, the Collaborative Action Team process, and is exploring ways in which this process can be applied to rural communities. This literature review informs SEDL's work with rural communities regarding collaborative processes and provides an overview for other educators interested in the topic. The review describes the links between rural locales and rural schools; major issues facing both rural communities and schools; strategies that have been tried to address these issues, with particular attention to integrated school improvement-community development approaches; and the role of collaboration in such integrated approaches, highlighting characteristics and concerns particular to rural settings that should be addressed by a collaborative process such as SEDL's. (Contains 69 references.) (TD)

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Literature Review

*T*he *R*ole of *C*ollaboration in *I*ntegrating *S*chool *I*mprovement and *R*ural *C*ommunity *D*evelopment

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

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A Review of the Literature on the Role of Collaboration in Integrating School Improvement and Rural Community Development

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory
July 1999

Introduction

Although the U.S. "has been transformed into a mass society dominated by urban lifestyles, economic activity, and institutions" (Hobbs, 1992, p. 22), American education continues to include a significant rural constituency. As Sher (1995) reports, approximately half of U.S. public school districts, a third of public schools, and a fourth of public school students and teachers are "rural" (p. 147).* Rural life has changed significantly from the agrarian images that once dominated U.S. culture; Hobbs (1992) points out that:

> Rural people, however they are defined, now watch the same TV programs, consume most of the same products, and work many of the same jobs as their urban counterparts. (p. 22)

However, it is also true that "rural communities in America are not microcosms of their urban cousins" (Barnhardt, 1992, p. 255). Depending on a community's size, economic base, and relative isolation, much of daily life — including education and the school's roles within the community — still may be characterized by the kinds of values and lifestyles long associated with the U.S. countryside. In many rural areas, residents are more homogeneous in terms of demographic characteristics, norms, and values than in urban and suburban areas — although there is substantial diversity *across* rural communities (Nachtigal, 1994; Martinez-Brawley, 1990). Rural communities tend to be more geographically dispersed, more dependent on a single or limited economic resource base, and more vulnerable to economic downturns than their urban counterparts (Flora & Flora, 1991). These characteristics in turn exercise a strong influence on public education, so that schooling in rural areas often involves issues and needs that differ in significant ways from those in urban areas.

One of the most significant themes in the literature on rural education, especially over the past 15 years or so, has been the extreme interdependence between rural schools and rural communities. Scholars emphasize the importance of good schools for "community vitality" (Howley & Eckman, 1997, p. 1; see also Hobbs, 1992). Many also stress the importance of a healthy community for successful schooling. DeYoung (1991), for example, states that "the significance of local economies and local communities for

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* Definitions of "rural" vary from author to author, but generally involve some configuration of smaller size and distance from a metropolitan area. Sher cites a definition used by the Annenberg Rural Challenge, involving two elements: "First, a 'rural' school is one that draws the vast majority of its students from communities located outside the boundaries of any of the Census Bureau's Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas. Second, a rural school is one that serves students at any level from kindergarten through high school and that generally would be considered 'rural' in the context of its own state and region" (Sher, 1995, p. 148).

schooling practice remains underestimated and understudied" (p. 305), while Hobbs (1989) asserts flatly that "improved educational performance can be expected from improved economic well-being" in rural communities (p. 4).

Belief in the interdependence between rural schools and their communities has led to a number of initiatives focused on strengthening both student learning and the local community's economic and social resources. Most of these initiatives involve some degree of formal or informal collaboration between schools and community residents. The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory has developed a process for supporting collaborative work between schools and communities. SEDL has begun to explore the ways in which its Collaborative Action Team process (SEDL, 1998a) may be applied to help rural communities plan and implement strategies that integrate school improvement and community development.

The purpose of this literature review is to inform SEDL's work with rural communities regarding collaborative processes and, secondarily, to provide an overview for other educators interested in the topic. The review describes the links between rural locales and rural schools; major issues facing both communities and schools; and strategies that have been tried to address those issues, with particular attention to integrated school improvement–community development approaches. Finally, the review explores the role of collaboration in such integrated approaches, and highlights characteristics and concerns particular to rural settings that need to be addressed by a collaborative process such as SEDL's.

The literature on integrated school improvement–community development approaches is primarily descriptive and anecdotal. Evaluative data describing the impact of various initiatives on educational outcomes and on indicators of community well-being are extremely limited. In addition, virtually none of the literature found in the course of this review focuses systematically on collaborative processes; rather than a focus of study, collaboration either is taken for granted or is viewed as one among a number of steps involved in implementation. The discussion of collaborative issues, then, is guided primarily by the larger literature on collaboration, and in particular, by a SEDL–produced literature review, "Issues in Collaborative Work" (SEDL, 1998b).

The links between communities and schools in rural areas

The literature describes a variety of linkages between rural schools and their surrounding communities. These include both ways that schools influence the well-being, resources, and activities of the local community, and ways that the community influences the effectiveness of rural schooling.

Schools' influence on rural communities

In the 1980s Monk and Haller (1986, cited in Miller 1993) conducted a series of case studies examining rural schools. As Miller reports, "Probably the most significant theme to emerge from these researchers' case studies was the central role the school played in the community" (p. 92). This finding is echoed in a number of profiles of rural school–community relationships, and reports on the effects of consolidation note that, in some instances, very small communities actually disintegrated when the school was moved to a more distant location (Sher, 1995; Nachtigal, Haas, Parker & Brown, 1990).

Influences of the school on the community are generally described in terms of three broad themes. First, rural schools often function, both physically and symbolically, as a *community center*. Community civic and social activities may be held in school facilities; other social services or resources may be located in the school. Residents may use the school for adult education, or access a school's telecommunications or library resources. School activities may serve as the major source of community identity and pride (Haas, 1994; Hobbs, 1992). In addition to serving as a community center, the school or district also may function as a community's *principal employer*, providing jobs and employee benefits for a significant number of residents in an area of scarce employment opportunity (Howley & Eckman, 1997; Hobbs, 1992).

A third category of influence is that of providing *human capital* for the community (Lichter, Cornwell, & Eggebeen, 1993; Beaulieu, 1989). In sociological terms, human capital is described as "the knowledge and skills acquired by individuals that are necessary for individual development" (Wehlage, 1993, p. 4). By producing graduates who have the requisite knowledge and skills to function effectively as workers and citizens, schools may contribute to the community's well-being. However, there is no guarantee that, without other incentives, such graduates will remain in the communities in which they were raised (Miller, 1995).

The influence of community factors on rural schools

Except for providing a *local revenue base* for schools, the community's influence on rural schooling is, for the most part, discussed in terms that are at once less tangible and more complex than descriptions of the school's effects on rural communities. The two most common themes involve, first, *the community as purpose and context for schooling*, and second — a concept closely related to the first— the influence of *social capital* on student success in school. Although these ideas seem, in many ways, resistant to concrete discussion, they are so integral to current arguments for rural school reform that they bear examination.

The community as purpose and context for schooling. Central to current discussions of rural educational renewal is the belief in a sense of community as an important element of human beings' psychological and sociological well-being. This vision is exemplified by Galbraith (1992, citing Fellin, 1987), who describes a community as

> a group in which membership is valued as an end in itself. The community's members share a commitment to stability, subscribe to a set of common social norms, and maintain a sense of shared identity. In addition, the people have enduring and extensive personal contacts with each other. Lastly, a community concerns itself with many significant aspects of the members' lives, tolerates competing factions, and has procedures for handling conflict. (p. 10)

Theobald and Nachtigal (1995) reflect the belief among leading rural education scholars that "the ever-escalating global competition connected to our excessively individualized orientation to life" (p. 133) has seriously damaged "the quality of human community in this country" (p. 134). To restore community vitality, it is necessary to stop trying to impose the kinds of centrally mandated, all-purpose solutions that result from an

industrial view of society, and to adopt a "new set of cultural assumptions grounded in ecologically sustainable practices" (p. 134). Such an ecological perspective honors diversity, recognizes the importance of place, and links individual purpose and accomplishment to the health of the larger community.

Attention to place (with "place" and "community" always linked and sometimes interchangeable) is echoed throughout the rural education literature. Theobald (1992) talks about the importance of "localness"; Sher (1995) discusses "pedagogy of place"; the rural school–community development program established through the PACERS Small Schools Cooperative includes a major component focused on "genius of place" (Program for Rural Services and Research, 1995). Attention to place also includes support for smallness. Howley and Eckman (1997) state:

> Maintaining good rural schools and communities means recognizing that being small can be a virtue and needs to be cultivated as such. Unfortunately, . . .cities have been the model of the good life. . . People who care about rural schools and communities need to understand the virtues of smallness, and they need to cultivate the purposes peculiar to rural places. (p. 1)

An important corollary to the belief in community is the belief that schools have an important role in helping students to become effective community members. The literature reflects a strong backlash against the narrow purpose of schooling as the preparation of productive workers, or as Howley and Eckman (1997) describe it, against "an economically centered schooling paradigm" which "makes schools an extension of a production system in which children enter as raw material to be processed through an educational factory. . . and exit the system ready to be plugged in as workers" (p. 30). The goal of education, these and other rural scholars argue, is to help students to become "creative, productive, critical citizens" (Foxfire Fund, 1998, p. 5). And, as Theobald and Nachtigal (1995) observe, "living well in the community is more than an economic endeavor" (p. 135).

With the goal of "living well in the community," the standard for educational success becomes more than that of individual student success. Webb, Shumway, and Shute (1996) quote rural advocate Wendell Berry who, when asked, "What would be your approach to improving education?" replied: "I'd change the standard. I would make the standard that of community health rather than the career of the student" (p. v). Webb, Shumway, and Shute note that:

> While it is neither reasonable nor possible to hold school people accountable for the development of the whole child, they can be held accountable for the creation of an environment that engenders in young people a mindful and thoughtful approach to the world around them. (pp. 6-7)

Social capital and its influence on student success. Community vitality in rural areas is strongly dependent on the existence of *social capital*, a concept frequently employed by rural scholars in discussing the interdependence between school and community. Social capital theory was originally developed by sociologist James Coleman when he

studied differences in achievement between students in private and public schools. The theory "helps explain how certain characteristics of families, neighborhoods, and communities affect student success in school" (Wehlage, 1993, p. 4). Wehlage explains that, while *human capital* refers to individual skills and knowledge, *social capital* "resides in groups as a result of organized, collective effort" (p. 4). Social capital also exists within families, in the "informal social relationships that occur between parents and their children" (p. 4), and also in the informal relationships within extended families and networks of families, such as neighbors.

The most critical elements of social capital "are shared attitudes, norms and values that promote trust and common expectations" (Wehlage, p. 4). If social capital is weak within a family, neighborhood, or community, the result is "unclear norms that permit inconsistent behaviors and sanctions" (p. 5). Children, then, tend to lack a clear sense as to what they can expect from others, and as to what others expect of them; they become more susceptible to their own impulses or to peer pressure or other negative influences. The presence or absence of social capital, it should be noted, is not a function of affluence or poverty, class or education; as Wehlage points out, "In general, all segments of contemporary society — the more affluent as well as the poor — reflect increasing adult neglect of children" (p. 5). As a result,

> The single most important problem that American society faces in its effort to educate children is that young people become segregated from the structure of responsibilities and rewards of the productive adult society. . . Children and adolescents face historically unprecedented challenges in finding a sense of purpose in their schooling tasks and a sense of connection with adult roles of authority and responsibility. The problem. . . is to find ways of overcoming the obstacles presented by the forces that have generated this segregation. (Hoffer & Coleman, 1990, pp. 129-130)

Assertions as to the importance of social capital for student success in school are not confined to discussions of rural education (Wehlage, 1993). However, some rural scholars, such as DeYoung (1989), assert that "renewing the bonds between rural schools and their communities, and thus restoring the social capital increasingly argued as important for school success, may be even more problematic in the countryside than it is in many metropolitan areas" (p. 40). Reasons include the smaller resource base within rural communities, the proportion of parents — particularly farmers and ranchers -- who must work more than one job in order to support the family, and the frequency of school consolidation, which has eroded community cohesiveness.

Issues facing rural communities

Given the interdependence between rural communities and rural schools, it is important to consider issues related to rural school improvement within the context of issues facing their surrounding communities. Though some areas are thriving, most rural communities have suffered severe declines in recent decades, in terms of economic resources, population, and environmental quality. There is a greater proportion of poverty in rural than in urban and suburban areas, and lower per-capita income among rural residents (Hobbs, 1992). As Miller (1995) points out, rural communities have been

"especially vulnerable to the economic, social, and environmental trends emerging from the nation's move away from local manufacturing and resource based industries, toward a multi-national, global economy" (p. 1). In addition to market factors, Flora and Flora (1990) also attribute the weakened economic and social environments in many rural communities to an anti-rural national policy environment.

A shrinking economic base

Mazie and Killian (1991) describe a number of long-term structural shifts in the U.S. economy that have disproportionately affected rural areas:

> (1) a long-term decline in resource-based employment; (2) a downward trend in the number of manufacturing jobs and a minimal increase in the quality of those jobs; and (3) a rapid increase in the number of service jobs. . . , but an overall deterioration of earnings in those jobs. (p. 17)

According to Walzer (1991), the main employment sectors in rural areas traditionally have been "resource-based industries," principally "agriculture, mining, and forestry." Manufacturing in rural areas has tended to be "fairly routine and low-skilled," precisely the types of jobs that have been increasingly moved to third-world countries (p. xvii). While there has been growth in service sector jobs in rural areas, "this increase has been generated by large companies or chains, rather than by locally owned businesses. Much of this employment is part-time and pays relatively low wages" (p. xix).

Shrinking human and social capital

In the 1970s and 1980s, rural areas also suffered from severe population declines, due to an out-migration of residents in search of employment and also, to a lesser extent, to declining birth rates and an aging population (Miller, 1993). There are indications that, in the 1990s, many rural areas are again gaining population (Carney, 1997). However, even in areas where the population is growing, rural communities tend to lack social and human capital, since new residents often fail to develop allegiance to place. Hobbs (1992) explains:

> Whereas [small rural] communities were once places where people went to church, worked, shopped, went to the doctor, and went to school, many have become places where people live, while depending on other larger communities for necessary services. Often the community has come to mean less to people who live there because it doesn't satisfy as many needs. . . It is increasingly difficult to maintain a sense of community in many rural localities when so many things residents depend on are located somewhere else. (p. 30)

Environmental degradation

Miller (1993) notes that, with the decline in manufacturing and industry in rural areas, "the quality of the environment may be one of the last marketable resources available in many rural communities." However, he also observes that "rural America has become the dumping ground for the waste products of urban core areas" (p. 100). As political clout has accumulated in urban areas, rural communities have found themselves lacking the voice and the votes to fight efforts by both cities and corporations to take advantage of rural environmental resources. As an example, residents in two Central

Texas counties currently are struggling to protect their air and water quality, which are threatened by an alliance between a Texas city in need of new water sources and a major corporation engaged in surface mining. The residents' efforts have been hampered by their proportionate lack of representation in the state legislature and by the overriding power of a large municipality (Neighbors for Neighbors, 1999).

Strategies for rural community development

Rural communities have tried a number of community development strategies designed to strengthen local resources and attract new ones. Wilkinson (1988, quoted in Mulkey, 1992, p. 15) defines *community development* as "building (or at least trying to build) the capacity for self-help and self-direction through community action." Miller (1995) points out that community development can include "any effort designed to improve the economic, social or environmental well-being of the community" (p. 2). However, most of the literature on community development "has tended to focus on economics and thus fail[ed] to recognize the interdependent nature of these three dimensions" (p. 2).

Flora, Gale, Schmidt, Green, and Flora (1993) distinguish between community "self-development" and efforts that merely involve recruiting outside industry or other resources. The authors report that most of the 103 rural community self-development efforts they studied "were initiated following an economic crisis affecting the locality" (p. 8). Community development efforts may have different goals. Flora and Flora (1991) identify three of the most common goals: "population retention (residence), employment creation (work), or vitality of retail trade and service activities (consumption)" and observe that a community's goal "influences the strategy chosen for economic development" (p. 143). However, they also note that:

> In assessing keys to community/economic development, it is important to keep in mind both means and ends. Population retention, job creation, and retail trade all are means to an end. The ends include improved quality of life, as well as intangible elements, such as job satisfaction, a feeling of efficacy, and participation in decisions affecting one's life. (p. 148)

Strategies for population growth or retention

Most approaches to maintaining or increasing population levels in rural areas are closely linked to job creation strategies (see the section which follows). An exception is the attraction of retirees, most of whom do not seek employment and whose presence can stimulate job growth. The advantages of attracting retirees are that many have disposable income, which they tend to spend in businesses close to home. Many retirees also possess valuable skills and experience that can be channeled into civic activities. There are disadvantages as well, however. Jobs generated by the needs of retirees are often in low-wage service areas; and retirees often resist the tax increases needed to stimulate community development (Flora & Flora, 1991).

Another strategy is to seek ways of preventing the youth within a community from moving away from home once they have completed their education. As will be discussed later, a number of joint school improvement–community development

strategies are intended, at least in part, to address this goal. However, encouraging youth to remain in their home communities is acknowledged as a precarious undertaking (Mulkey 1992). Flora and Flora (1991) conclude:

> A better strategy than preventing youth outmigration is to attract families in the "full-nest" stage of the life cycle, thereby increasing the quality of human resources in the community. This requires a two-prong strategy: creation of quality jobs and amenity/service enhancement. In particular, the quality of schools is especially important to this age group. (p. 146)

Strategies for employment generation

Approaches to generating new employment opportunities range from efforts to attract corporate industry through advertising, tax abatement, or other incentives, to community-developed entrepreneurial activities. Flora and Flora (1991), among others, also observe that attracting retirees can generate new jobs, although these jobs often tend to be "low paying service jobs" (p. 147).

Telecommunications technology has played a role in the economic redevelopment of some rural communities. Wilson (1992), reporting on case studies of five rural communities, concludes that "telecommunications advances can significantly contribute to rural community development" (p. 298). Carney (1997) describes a University of Washington professor who studied counties experiencing economic growth "and found them full of independent consultants, contractors, brokers, and other types of professionals that use modern telecommunications (along with some leg work) to serve customers around the country and around the world" (p. 2). In one survey, the professor "found that 40 percent of the new companies in rural areas were primarily serving customers outside their regions. Many of them are small professional companies, sometimes just a single person" (p. 3).

As Wilson (1992) points out, the potential offered by telecommunications, "is largely one of an enabling infrastructure" (p. 298). Telecommunications can complement other community factors "such as natural amenities or geographic location" (p. 299). It can also support interactions within a community or between cooperating communities. However, Carney (1997) cautions that new telecommunications technologies are leading to centralization of employment and services as well as to decentralization. The tension between these two trends is not yet resolved, and "there is still no guarantee that rural America will benefit any more from the approaching technological era than from previous ones" (p. 3).

In attempting to generate employment opportunities, communities need to plan carefully and to consider fully the implications of the strategies they choose. Flora and Flora (1991) caution that employment generation approaches "should result in the generation of 'primary' jobs, those that pay well enough to support the primary income earner in the family" (p. 146). However, for most communities:

> The employment generation approach has an implicit assumption that one job is as good as another. Thus, the emphasis on increasing employment frequently results in efforts to attract low-wage industrial and service sector jobs. . . Although [such jobs] may increase family income, they are

> not effective in bringing in new families or in retaining those who are on the verge of leaving. . . Low-wage employment contributes to the separation of residence from employment. (pp. 144-145)

Strategies for community revitalization

Downtown revitalization and historic preservation are primary strategies for increasing retail trade and encouraging local residents to shop within their own community (Flora & Flora, 1991). Some authors also note the importance of revitalization efforts that address community pride and involvement as well as retail consumption. For example, Hobbs (1992) observes that community development specialists are focusing increasingly on activities that move beyond narrow definitions of economic development. Similarly, Flora and Flora (1991) point out that "social infrastructure" is increasingly recognized

> as a major mechanism for overcoming the constraints of economic infrastructure. . . As more and more responsibility is placed on local communities to generate needed resources, the human capital and social organization and institutions present in a community become key elements in its economic development. (p. 148)

This broader focus on community revitalization includes a "greater emphasis on knowledge-based rural development" (Hobbs, 1992, p. 36). Knowledge-based strategies include, among other things, "continuing education regarding the impact of regional and national changes on the rural community" (p. 37). With greater knowledge about community development issues, and with greater skills in planning and organization, it is argued, rural residents become better equipped to manage their community development efforts.

Issues facing rural schools

The impact of population loss, economic stress, and dissolution of community extends to rural schools as well as their surrounding locales. With a shrinking tax base in terms of both population density and level of income, many rural schools struggle to make ends meet. Rural areas that have managed to attract retirees often find those new residents opposed to tax increases that could bolster school resources (Flora & Flora, 1991). As a result, rural schools generally are able to "offer fewer courses at the secondary level, and provide fewer options for special need students at the elementary level" (Nachtigal,1994, p. 25). Lewis (1994) reports that:

> Economic stress in rural areas is. . . reducing support for school programs and employment options that might prevent further migration [of graduates]. School facilities in rural areas are in distressing condition, with 50 percent of current buildings estimated to be sub-standard. . . Administrators report problems with recruiting teachers. (pp. 63-64)

The difficult job of providing a full range of educational opportunities in rural school districts has been complicated by the standards movement and other policies aimed at making schools more effective and efficient. Rural schools have shown little, if any, improvement as a result of reform efforts (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995; Crihfield, 1991).

This has been attributed, at least in part, to the limited focus most reforms have placed on the critical need for sustainability and viability of rural schools and the community at large (Miller, 1995; Haas, 1994). Decades of policy decisions aimed at addressing educational and societal problems have resulted in a weakened relationship between rural communities and their schools (Sher, 1995; Haas, 1994; DeYoung, 1989). When school reform policies aimed at standardizing curriculum requirements were adopted, they led to a movement away from localness in curricululm, and thus away from relevance in many instances (Theobald, 1992).

Consolidation, once thought of as a panacea for rural schools, in many instances has led only to other problems, including a further weakening of rural communities' involvement with their schools. Consolidation policies have negatively affected many rural schools and communities (Sher, 1995; Nachtigal, Haas, Parker & Brown, 1990). Hobbs (1989) reports that "research evidence reveals little, if any, economic and educational benefit associated with increases in school size" (p. 11), and recent research has "uncover[ed] a negative relationship between school (or district) size and student achievement" (Howley & Eckman, 1997, p. 30) In spite of such evidence, however, consolidation continues to be a priority for rural schools in some areas. Sher (1995) observes that

> much of rural America. . . is still being coerced into accepting school consolidations and school districts mergers as the cornerstone of rural school reform. This brand of "restructuring" is seen (correctly) as the necessary precondition for the proper implementation of the factory model of education. [The industrial model] lies buried deep — but far from dead — within state and federal policies, standards of school accreditation and college admission, professional training programs, and the hearts and minds of administrators and decision makers whose professional socialization revolved around this model. (p. 144)

Reform policies, then — including consolidation, curriculum standardization, and other strategies that diminish local input — generally have resulted in a deterioration of the traditional bonds of pride and involvement between rural communities and their schools. This deterioration has been compounded by the broader community trends cited earlier, of rural residents whose primary activities and allegiances rest not with their immediate environment but with the larger cities in which they work, shop, and socialize.

Strategies for strengthening rural schools

In rural schools, as in other schools, the ultimate goal of any improvement effort is to strengthen student performance. Rural schools are engaged in a wide range of initiatives similar to those underway in urban and suburban schools — focusing, for example, on curricular reform, mentoring, restructuring of district and building leadership, or the establishment of learning communities (Stoops, 1995; Horsley, Terry, Hergert, & Loucks-Horsley, 1991).

However, a number of rural school initiatives specifically address rural characteristics and concerns; these generally address the goal of improved student achievement via

strategies designed to bolster local resources, both financial and social. Like their surrounding communities, and often working cooperatively with them, rural schools are seeking alternatives that can make the most effective use of scarce resources, can boost school funding by enhancing the economic well-being of the community at large, and can strengthen community involvement and social capital (Miller, 1995; Nelson, 1995; Stern, Stone, Hopkins, McMillion, & Crain, 1994).

As an alternative to consolidation, for example, some rural schools have established cooperatives with nearby schools and districts, through which the cooperating schools share resources and set common goals, but also maintain their local autonomy and local school sites (Howley & Eckman, 1997; Nachtigal, 1992). Such cooperative strategies achieve many of the benefits of consolidation, such as increased course offerings and economies of scale, without the disadvantage of reducing community support for the local school. Distance learning is another alternative to consolidation that is being implemented in an increasing number of rural schools. Telecommunications networks allow schools to link to other sites — a community college, for example, or another rural school — that can provide student instruction and/or teacher training (Howley & Eckman, 1997).

Of primary interest for this report, of course, are strategies that directly integrate school improvement and rural community development. Although the goals of integrated approaches are described primarily in terms of school and student outcomes (see the section which follows), such approaches generally address the community development strategies discussed earlier: population retention or growth, economic development, and community revitalization that enhances social capital (Miller, 1995). Population retention and growth generally are addressed through strategies designed to increase employment opportunities and to make the local community a more appealing place in which to live. Economic development generally involves either employment generation or strategies for revitalizating retail trade. Community revitalization may encompass a great variety of activities that build community pride, involvement, and citizenship skills (Howley & Eckman, 1997).

Such initiatives, though increasing in popularity, are not widespread. Miller (1995) notes that integrated school–community approaches have been "constrained by educator and community conceptions of schooling that limit learning opportunities within the perimeters of the school's walls and textbooks" (p. 1). Hutto and Cooper (1992), surveying rural administrators in the Southwest, found that "most [rural] school districts place comparatively little emphasis" on community economic development (p. 20).

A few scholars speak in opposition to integrated approaches, particularly those geared toward community economic development. Crihfield (1991), for example, states that that "local public schools in rural areas are not the solution to problems of rural development" (p. 94), and that "the business of the schools is to educate students, not to lure business or entice employees" (p. 93). Mulkey (1992), although supporting strong links between rural schools and communities, also argues against a narrow focus on economic development. He observes that "the strength of the relationship between improvements in education and economic development is easily overstated" and urges instead

> a more crucial role for schools in the development *of* rural communities in addition to any contribution to growth *in* communities. . .[T]he distinction between development and growth is more than semantics and. . . the development of a community is more crucial and perhaps, critical to the success of efforts to encourage growth in a community. (p. 14)

As the next section indicates, most integrated initiatives *do* extend their focus beyond that of economic development. Most programs include goals for student learning, student development of skills and experiences that promote effective community membership, and development of social capital (often discussed in terms of community values or community support), in addition to — or, in some cases, instead of — the community's economic health.

Approaches to joint school-community development

Linking school and community has a lengthy history among educational reformers, extending back to Dewey and beyond (Stephens, 1995). Within the past two decades, this approach has moved to the forefront among many rural education reformers. A number of current programs and initiatives are grounded in the conviction that communities and their schools are so thoroughly interdependent that the well being of one cannot be separated from the well being of the other. These include the Program for Rural Services and Research at the University of Alabama (which operates the PACERS Small Schools Cooperative), the Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota, the Foxfire Fund, Inc., the School at the Center project at the University of Nebraska, and REAL Enterprises, Inc. The New York State School Boards Association, in a 1990 report, recommends comprehensive school–community links. And the Annenberg Rural Challenge, a $50 million initiative from the Annenberg Foundation, supports "schools [that] encourage mutually beneficial exchanges between the school and community. . . Such schools blur school/community barriers, and assist students at all levels to make meaningful contributions to the well-being of their own localities" (Annenberg Rural Challenge, n.d., p. 9).

Miller (1995) identifies three major categories into which most integrated school improvement–community development initiatives fall. These are "the school as a community center, serving as both a resource for lifelong learning and as a vehicle for the delivery of a wide range of services" (p. 5); "the community as curriculum, emphasizing the study of community in all its various dimensions" (p. 6); and "school-based enterprise," which "places a major emphasis on developing entrepreneurial skills whereby students not only identify potential service needs in their rural communities, but actually establish a business to address those needs" (p. 6). Each of these approaches is discussed in the following paragraphs.

The school as a community center

The use of the school as a community center is one of the more common kinds of partnership between schools and the community (Miller, 1995). The school as community center can be a resource for lifelong learning, providing educational and retraining opportunities as well as serving as a facility for community gatherings, civic and business meetings, and the like. An example of this approach can be found in the

work of the Center for School Change, which provides financial and technical assistance to rural and other schools in Minnesota. As part of the practices required of participating schools, schools are expected to open their doors to the community and to encourage community members to make much more extensive use of school buildings and facilities as well as the expertise of educators (Center for School Change, n.d.).

The school as a community technology center is a variation on this approach to partnership. It combines public and private resources to provide technology equipment and services to meet the needs of the schools, other public service organizations, the business community, and private citizens (Wilson, 1992).

Another variation on this theme are school-linked service arrangements, which allow schools and other social welfare agencies to work together to bring an array of social services to students and their families (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). School-linked services, also known as integrated or comprehensive school-based services, have grown out of the recognition that a child's social, physical, psychological and economic needs influence academic success, and that the school is often the most constant public institution in the lives of families. Such services involve cooperation among a variety of agencies, with the school as the single or primary point of contact (Melaville, Blank, & Asayesh, 1993; Payzant, 1992; Kirst & McLaughlin, 1990).

Unlike the other two categories identified by Miller, this category of joint school–community activity does not include a student learning component. Students as well as other community members may benefit from specific activities, such as school-linked services or the establishment of a community technology center within the school, but student instruction is not explicitly related to activities in this category. Evaluations of such collaborative activities have been minimal; reports on school-linked services have noted the weakness of evaluative components and the lack of useful data regarding the effectiveness of such approaches in improving student outcomes (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997; Kritek, 1996). Thus little is known about the extent of impact such approaches have had on rural school students or their communities.

The community as curriculum

The focus on community as curriculum is based on several ideas. The first relates to principles of constructivist learning theory (though that link is not generally made explicit in the literature): the belief that experiential learning, with a focus on understanding, is more powerful than textbook–driven instructional approaches that focus on facts and abstract theorems. Howley and Eckman (1997), for example, in discussing community-based instructional approaches, state that "*understanding* is the big picture into which facts and skills fit" (p. 12). Webb, Shumway, and Shute (1996) describe "genuine learning" as "pointed toward the making of personal meaning; that is, of making sense of the world around us" (p. 16).

A related idea is that, as students make sense of their immediate environment, they gain a better understanding of both themselves and the world, as well as a greater sense of commitment to their own community. The Foxfire program, for example, operates on the belief that once students understand their own locale, they can make better sense of the world around them (Foxfire, Inc., n.d.). Theobald and Nachtigal (1995) echo this belief:

> Focusing on place, using the community as a curricular lens, not only contributes to re-creating community, but it will also help realize true school renewal — first, by making learning more experiential and therefore more powerful, and second, by providing youths with an ability to understand who they are and how they might be in the world. The more students understand their community and its environs — its social structure, its economy, its history, its music, its ecology — the more they become invested in that community. (p. 134)

In focusing on the community around them, students may engage in a broad range of activities that explore and document local traditions, conditions, and needs. Examples of these include documenting local history, testing air and water quality, studying land-use patterns, conducting health surveys, and developing and administering needs assessments (Miller, 1995; Nelson, 1995; Program for Rural Services and Research, n.d.). In addition to providing a framework for student learning, such activities presumably benefit the community as well, by fostering community cohesiveness and pride, by providing information communities can use in planning self-development initiatives, and by filling gaps in human resources and expertise (Miller, 1995; Theobald and Nachtigal, 1995).

The concept of *service learning* fits into this category of integrated school–community approaches. Service learning activities are explicitly designed to address a community need; students provide "community service," operating with charitable as well as instructional intent. Checkoway (1996) explains that, via service learning, students "can help people to assess needs, set priorities, formulate plans, implement programs, and create change. They can provide technical assistance that makes an important difference at the community level." Service learning "enable[s] students to serve the community, reflect on their experiences, and learn lessons or derive principles for the future" (p. 600). Kahne and Westheimer (1996) observe that, in addition to helping the people they serve,

> service learning activities seek to promote students' self-esteem, to develop higher-order thinking skills, to make use of multiple abilities, and to provide authentic learning experiences — all goals of current curriculum reform efforts. (p. 593)

Service learning has generated interest beyond rural schools alone. Jeremy Rifkin, a social researcher and futurist, has asserted that service learning will be essential in schools in the future, because there will be a tremendous need for workers in the civic (nonprofit) sector in the Information Age (Slavin, 1996). The New York State School Boards Association (1990), in recommending community-service programs, cites their benefit as a career training strategy. Stephens (1995) notes that The Carnegie Council has "advocated community service for all middle school students" (p. 9), and that in 1992, the state of Maryland made 75 hours of service a requirement for high school graduation. Stephens, however, notes an important distinction between community service per se and service learning: In service learning, "service is improved by being anchored in the curriculum and learning is deepened by utilizing the community as a laboratory for the classroom" (p. 10).

Kahne and Westheimer (1996) distinguish two basic approaches to service learning: "charity" and "change." They describe the goal of charity as "the development of altruism" (p. 595), while the "change" orientation "call[s] for a curriculum that emphasizes critical reflection about social policies and conditions, the acquisition of skills of political participation, and the formation of social bonds" (p. 595). They conclude that "much of the current discussion regarding service learning emphasizes charity, not change" (p. 595). However, it is the change orientation that places the strongest emphasis on reflection and collaborative activity.

Most of the leading rural education initiatives include a strong focus on the community as curriculum, in terms of both community exploration and service learning. For example, The PACERS Small Schools Cooperative's educational program, Better Schools Building Better Communities, includes a component titled "Genius of Place," which "provides students opportunities to gain and use academic skills through the study and documentation of their own communities. It affirms the value of rural communities and produces information useful for their appropriate development" (Program for Rural Services and Research, 1995, p. 1). A second component, "Sustaining Communities: Housing, Food, Good Work, and Health" is a service learning approach; it "supports the long-term viability of rural communities and helps students develop basic life skills" (p. 1). PACERS schools operate community theatre projects, songwriting projects, creative writing projects where students develop histories of their communities, and photography projects through which students and teachers visually document the lives of their schools and communities. In one PACERS student health project, students assisted by health professionals developed, administered, and analyzed student health inventories (Program for Rural Services and Research, n.d.).

Rural school assistance provided by the Center for School Change includes the use of a school curriculum that helps students develop community pride and knowledge of local history, culture, and economy. Students also participate in service learning programs. For example, students in one participating high school publish a magazine about the community's history. Students in another community work with a local adult volunteer on a prairie restoration program. Many students in the CSC programs participate in environmental research and monitoring projects, including River Watch and the Midwestern River Project, two of the largest networks gathering data on the Mississippi River (Center for School Change, n.d.).

Activities supported by the School at the Center project also include service learning projects. In a mathematics and applied construction unit students learn basic remodeling skills and can apply their skills by working as an apprentice while building affordable housing. Students also make repairs in the homes of elderly citizens. Students in two school districts are studying ways of using wind power and energy-efficient buildings to save energy. Several school districts have involved students in the study and care of a nature preserve (School at the Center, n.d.). Similarly, activities carried out in Foxfire-supported classrooms are service learning and documentary in their approach. For example, students in a fifth grade class "adopted" the local animal shelter, planned and conducted community awareness and fundraising activities, including designing and selling t-shirts. Students from another class helped area

foresters plant trees; they then monitored the trees' growth and wrote about their experiences (Foxfire Fund, Inc., n.d.).

As is true of other kinds of initiatives, evaluative data on programs in this category is extremely limited. Stephens (1995), in describing service learning programs, reports that "the most consistent evidence of gains is associated with tutoring programs" (p. 15). She also notes, however, that "evaluations of service projects have almost uniformly pointed to improved critical thinking" (p. 208). Checkoway (1996) reports that studies have shown that "service learning can develop substantive knowledge and practical skills and contribute to lifelong social responsibility and civic values" (p. 600).

School-based enterprise

School entrepreneurship programs are those where students design, own, and/or operate economically viable small businesses under the guidance of the school and, in many cases, community partners (Haas & Lambert, 1995; Miller, 1995; Nachtigal, Haas, Parker, & Brown, 1990). These businesses can be profitmaking or not-for-profit enterprises. They are meant to benefit the community as well as the student; they try, therefore, to meet needs of the community without competing with local businesses. In addition to meeting retail or service needs in the community, student businesses can improve community involvement with schools and thus benefit social cohesiveness (Miller, 1995).

Many school entrepreneurial enterprises have been highly successful, either as single endeavors or as parts of larger programs. For example, entrepreneurial projects carried out by schools in the PACERS Small Schools Cooperative have included the development of businesses through which students build and sell solar-heated houses; build, sell, and operate greenhouses; practice organic farming and sell the produce; and operate aquaculture systems. Students conduct community surveys to determine needs for small business services and create and run those businesses. Often the businesses are taken on as ongoing private enterprise by graduating students or other adult community members. Many PACERS schools publish newspapers for their communities that provide coverage of events of interest to adult community members, such as elections, town council meetings, and police activities. Students manage the newspaper as a business and rely on advertising to cover printing and distribution costs. Students in programs supported by the Center for School Change also gain entrepreneurial education and experience. In one community, students operate both the grocery store and the hardware store. In another community, students own and operate an ice cream soda fountain.

One of the best-known entrepreneurial projects designed to strengthen rural schools and communities is REAL Enterprises, Inc. Jonathan Sher established the program using "school-based community development corporations" as a way for schools to educate their youth to stay in their communities and thrive as entrepreneurs. REAL provides curriculum materials and teacher training in entrepreneurship and small business management. Through the program, students develop business plans and in some cases actually implement small businesses. A local "Community Support Team" composed of local entrepreneurs and small business owners helps with planning and support (REAL Enterprises, Inc., 1996).

The role of collaboration in integrated rural school–community development

For the most part, collaboration is an implied rather than an explicit component of integrated rural school–community development initiatives. Most of the activities listed in the preceding section — from school–linked services to student documentation of local history to student–operated businesses — require, at a minimum, the cooperation of individuals or groups outside the school. Even where such cooperation is informal, decisions often must be negotiated regarding schedules, resources, lines of authority and responsibility, and rules and protocols. In addition, rural researchers such as Theobald and Nachtigal (1995) and Flora and Flora (1990) strongly support the use of networking and partnerships as ways for rural communities to make better use of available resources and to obtain external assistance when needed.

A few programs include explicit collaborative mechanisms. The Center for School Change, for example, helps schools to establish school–community teams that plan and implement innovative programs. REAL Enterprises, Inc. uses "Community Support Teams" composed of local small business owners and entrepreneurs. However, relatively minimal attention is paid to the processes by which these teams function and to the impact of the collaborative process itself on programmatic effectiveness.

The literature on rural school–community development does, however, include some hints as to the function and benefits of collaboration — both actual and potential — in supporting such initiatives. Two major themes are most prominent: collaboration as a mechanism for effective community organizing, and as a mechanism for community capacity building in terms of leadership skills, planning skills, and social capital.

Community organizing

Hobbs (1992) asserts that, "in order to be most effective, [rural] education and training programs and services need to be collaborative, not only among various providers of education and training, but also with a broader spectrum of community groups, agencies, and organizations" (p. 39). He observes that "communities become effective when they organize themselves to address and resolve their commonly perceived problems (p. 31), a conclusion echoed by Don Anderson, a Washington D.C. attorney who created the National Alliance for Southern Poor. Anderson states,

> Organization is the key to power and economics. . . You can't have self-help unless there is some means of collective decision-making. That is where I believe most anti-poverty efforts fall short. They begin with a program, and not a structure or organization. (quoted in Prager, 1993, p. 10)

NASP uses an organization of collaboratively structured local "assemblies." As Prager (1993) reports, "Anderson asserts that in 25 years, he never made a specific recommendation for policy, strategy, or personnel to any of the 41 Assemblies operating in the South. It is in the hands of community members to direct change" (p. 13).

Capacity building

Hustedde (1991) reports that "many social scientists and policymakers believe that the key to addressing rural problems lies in the 'capacity building' of local leaders and citizens." Capacity building, as he describes it, "is concerned with enhancing the potential of local people to solve problems" (p. 111). The literature on collaborative processes indicates that participation in collaborative work can build leadership and decisionmaking skills (SEDL, 1998b). Wehlage (1993) observes that "any collective social action, such as a group of mothers organizing a crossing guard program for their school, generates social capital" (p. 4). And Flora, J.L., Gale, E., Schmidt, F.E., Green, G.P., & Flora, C.B. (1993), in describing the "noneconomic contributions" that self-development efforts make to rural communities, note that

> self-development projects tend to open up the decisionmaking process on economic development to a broader range of people in the community. . . Active involvement in self-development efforts tends to carry over into other collective community efforts. (p. 28)

Collaborative issues in integrating rural school–community development

The literature on collaboration indicates that community collaboration is a complex process with many factors that can contribute to success or failure (SEDL, 1998b; Mattesich & Monsey, 1992). A recent literature review prepared by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, for example, identified 13 separate elements as important to the success of community collaboratives: (1) community readiness, (2) membership, (3) leadership, (4) the role of facilitators, (5) decisionmaking processes, (6) communication and conflict, (7) building collaborative capacity, (8) planning, (9) acquiring and using resources, (10) program implementation, (11) monitoring and assessment, (12) momentum, and (13) institutionalization (SEDL, 1998b).

As noted earlier, discussions of integrated rural school–community development initiatives include little or no direct focus on collaborative issues and processes. However, some reports do address specific concerns or conditions that are particular to rural areas. These relate to four of the collaborative elements listed above: community readiness, membership, leadership, and communication and conflict. These concerns and conditions are outlined in the following paragraphs, along with one overriding concern: the need to reconsider common conceptions about the nature and purpose of rural schooling.

Rethinking the nature of rural schooling

Integrated school improvement–community development initiatives, as they are described here, go against the grain of traditional schooling in a number of ways. Learning is extended beyond the bounds of student desks, classrooms, even the school grounds. The curriculum is extended beyond textbooks and standardized materials. Instructional goals are adapted to include a focus on student service and other apparently nonacademic factors, perhaps to include a focus on "living well in the community" (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995, p. 135). To accommodate the community as curriculum and entrepreneurial programs, schools may need to reorganize their daily schedules, even their calendar years (New York State School Boards Association, 1990). As Miller (1995) concludes,

> It needs to be kept in mind that the changes implied in building a community-school development partnership where students engage in community-based learning experiences are essentially questions about changing the way schools go about preparing rural youth for the future. (p. 7)

The PACERS Small Schools Cooperative answers these questions by describing their integrated program as "an effort to transform the nature of schooling and community life" (Program for Rural Services and Research, 1995, p. 1). However, such transformation is not easily achieved. In describing the work of the Center for School Change, founder Joe Nathan admits, "We have had much more success overall in helping people create new schools. . . than we have in changing entire schools unless they are elementary schools" (Nathan, July 21, 1998). Nathan describes a variety of factors working against programs that are community–linked, interdisciplinary, and focused on contemporary concerns. For example, he notes that even outside agencies like the National Collegiate Athletics Association can erect barriers to schools' adoption of these innovative approaches. Nathan reports that NCAA requirements for student eligibility to participate in freshman college sports currently exclude high school courses that devote more than 25 percent of their time to community service or to contemporary social issues.

As Jonathan Sher (1995) states,

> History makes it plain that the factory model and the educational system it spawned are largely impervious to the contagious effects of . . . "pockets of goodness." . . . "The system" has demonstrated an awesome capacity to drive away, outlast, undermine, squelch, trivialize, or isolate reformers and reforms that do not conform to its world view. (p. 146)

Sher's conclusion echoes a finding reported in SEDL's (1998b) review of the larger literature on collaboration, that "institutional inertia is perhaps the greatest barrier" to successful collaborative initiatives (p. 26). The SEDL review cites Mawhinney (1996), who reports that "research on the involvement of schools in collaborative initiatives has documented their resistance to change and the persistence of their organizational structures and patterns" (p. 226).

Community readiness

According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation (n.d.), community readiness is a major consideration in the success of collaborative endeavors, and "plays a critical role in the timing and pace" of a collaborative initiative's development (p. 11). Readiness issues include resources, leadership, commitment, management capacity, and community excitement about major change.

Flora and Flora (1991) discuss readiness for rural self-development initiatives in terms of "social infrastructure. . . Social infrastructure includes intangible social factors, such as culture, entrepreneurship, the quality of social interaction, and social equality" within a community (p. 141). Hobbs (1992) cites a 1988 report by Flora and Flora in which they cite characteristics of "entrepreneurial" communities that contribute to a

community's readiness for self-development initiatives. Attributes that Flora & Flora found to be associated with "entrepreneurial communities" include:

> • Acceptance of controversy • A long-term emphasis on education • Adequate resources to facilitate collective risk-taking • Willingness to invest in local private initiatives • Willingness to tax themselves to invest in community improvements • Ability to define community broadly to envision larger boundaries for smaller communities • Ability to network vertically and horizontally to obtain resources, particularly information • A flexibly dispersed community leadership. (Hobbs, 1992, p. 38)

Membership (involving the entire community)

Flora and Flora (1993) include "symbolic diversity" as part of the social infrastructure needed by successful rural entrepreneurial communities. Symbolic diversity implies inclusiveness in membership, as well as the ability to openly address controversy in working toward decisions rather than either suppressing controversy or undergoing divisive and destructive conflict. Similarly, Mulkey (1992) observes, "From the community standpoint, inequality due either to ethnic background, gender, or socioeconomic status is a major factor which detracts from the creation of community in the sense of collective action" (p. 16). However, Flora and Flora (1991) point out that

> It is much more difficult to encompass the entire geographic community in rural communities in the South [than in communities in the Midwest and other parts of the country]. There are several reasons for this including greater stratification in the rural South, economic inequality, the legacy of race, and, in particular, the cultural recognition of clearly distinct social groups based on race and class. (p. 149)

Dealing with diversity in belief and lifestyle among group members can represent a larger issue in rural communities, due to the greater emphasis on conformity in values and behavior. As Martinez-Brawley (1990) observes,

> Just as manageable-size communities enhance a person's sense of meaning, belonging, and social support, they also demand a much greater degree of conformity and impose broader restrictions on one's freedom. . . The smaller the size, the stricter the rules that control the behavior of community members. (p. 41)

In terms of the broader literature on collaboration, Melaville, Blank, and Asayesh (1993) recommend the inclusion of "people who will bring *clout*, *commitment*, and *diversity* to the table" (p. 25). They note that assuring both clout and diversity, particularly in terms of authentic community representation, often seems an overwhelming task.

Leadership

Walzer (1991), in describing rural community economic development, concludes that "successful community projects are built on strong local leadership." However, he notes, "in small communities, local leadership usually is not sufficient to bring about economic development." (p. xxii). Similarly, Beaulieu (1989) reports that community leadership in rural areas is often based on specialized skills, with leaders lacking the

broader organizing skills needed for community development. Hobbs (1992) relays the conclusion by a "noted rural development specialist" that "the most important rural need is for a more informed local leadership" (p. 39).

Flora et al., 1993, state that "a flexible, diversified community leadership structure" is important to successful rural self-development efforts. By this they mean that "the climate is favorable to the participation of different groups in leadership roles in the community — women, minorities. . ., those with diverse socioeconomic and occupational characteristics" (p. 9), and newcomers to the community. These authors also note, however, that, "while diversity of input and periodic rotation of leadership are important, diffuse leadership is usually undesirable" (p. 9). This conclusion reflects a finding in the broader collaborative literature that "the issue of leadership presents something of a double bind" (SEDL, 1998b, p. 15). Wolff and Foster (1995), for example, state that collaboratives need "a clearly identified leadership structure, but also need to disperse leadership as broadly as possible"
(p. 3-32).

Communication and conflict

A common theme in the rural development literature is that of the effects of close personal relationships on communication patterns and the ways in which conflict is — or is not — addressed. As Flora et al. (1993) describe it, in most rural locales, "community members interact with one another on a regular, informal, and relatively personal basis. . . They know each other through multiple roles. . . This often leads to repression of controversy" (pp. 11-12) and to an emphasis on personality rather than on issues. Horsley et al. (1991) conclude that, because the intensity of social interactions in rural communities, "the credibility of the message is related as much to *who* said it as to *what* is said" (p. 8).

The literature on collaborative processes emphasizes the importance of effective communication, in terms of maintaining ongoing contact, sharing information, exploring assumptions, and dealing productively with conflict. Melaville and Blank (1991) note that "participants need to establish a communication process that gives them permission to disagree and uses conflict and its resolution as a constructive means of moving forward" (p. 37).

Conclusions

Given the nature of most rural school and community–linked programs, it would appear that the structured use of collaborative approaches, such as SEDL's Collaborative Action Team process and others, could greatly enhance integrated rural development initiatives. Collaborative models can build on rural strengths, such as the closeness of interpersonal relationships and the commitment to community values. Collaborative models also offer resources to address weaknesses identified in the rural education literature, such as the need for generalized leadership skills, the weakness in social capital, and the lack of effective mechanisms for addressing conflict and diversity. SEDL's Collaborative Action Team process, for example, contains resources to address issues related to the collaborative elements that appear to be of particular concern in rural communities:

- Re: community readiness: The CAT process includes a self-assessment instrument for gauging a community's readiness to initiate collaborative work.

- Re: membership: The CAT process provides tips for identifying and recruiting a broadly representative membership base.

- Re: leadership: The CAT process provides training activities that help to develop leadership and decisionmaking skills, and offers a step-by-step process for consensus decisionmaking.

- Re: communication and conflict: The CAT process provides both training and guidelines to help groups communicate often and effectively, and to work through conflicts without personalizing them. (SEDL, 1998a)

With such an attenuated research base, however, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about most of the intersections between collaborative processes and integrated school improvement–rural community development initiatives. Clearly, a great deal more research is needed on the role and effectiveness of collaboration in supporting such initiatives, as well as on the impact and effectiveness of the initiatives themselves.

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